

We claim:

1 In a data communications network having a plurality of mobile personal
information devices and at least one server computer, a method of providing a place-and-
5 people based information service run on the at least one server computer to users operating
the mobile personal information devices, comprising:

defining for a user of the information service a list of people;

receiving reports of locations of the mobile personal information devices operated by
the user and by the listed people;

10 determining based on the reported locations which of the listed people are within a
specified proximity of the user; and

transmitting information identifying which of the listed people are within the
specified proximity of the user to the user's mobile personal information device.

15 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising transmitting the information in
response to a search request submitted by the user.

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
detecting that the determination of which of the listed people are within a specified
20 proximity of the user has changed as a result of any of the reports of locations; and
transmitting the information in response to the detecting.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the specified proximity is user controlled via
setting a user-specified proximity parameter.

25 5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
maintaining visibility parameters per each of the listed people; and
omitting to identify those of the listed people whose visibility parameter is set to not
visible from the transmitted information.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
user-controllably setting a notification enabling parameter to disable the transmitting the information to the user's mobile personal information device.

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7. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
defining for the user a plurality of groups of the listed people;
designating for the user to receive the information of a subset of the groups; and
excluding those of the listed people not in the designated subset from identification
in the transmitted information.

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8. A place-specific buddy list service system operated on server computers of a distributed data communications network for access from personal data communications computers, the system comprising:

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a database maintaining a people/place state for a user of the service, the people/place state enumerating at least one group of people also using the service and locations of such people;

a people location tracker operating responsive to reports of the location of the people to update the people/place state; and

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an inference engine operating to process the people/place state to infer which of the people are in the user's proximity, and to generate a notification for the user having information identifying the people inferred to be in the user's proximity.

9. The system of claim 8 further comprising an eventing engine operating responsive to a change in the people/place state to cause the inference engine to process the inference and generate the notification.

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10. The system of claim 8 further comprising a search engine operating responsive to a user-initiated search request to cause the inference engine to process the inference and to cause the notifier to generate the notification.

5 11. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine infers which people are in the user's proximity and generates the notification in accordance with a set of parameters, including a visibility parameter associated with a person enumerated in the people/place state, the inference engine operating to exclude the person when the visibility parameter is set to a not visible value.

10 12. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine infers which people are in the user's proximity and generates the notification in accordance with a set of parameters, including a proximity scope parameter to control a scope within which the people are considered to be in the user's proximity.

15 13. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine further operates to infer resources other than the people are in the user's proximity, and to include information of such other resources in the notification.

20 14. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine infers which people are in the user's proximity and generates the notification in accordance with a set of parameters, the inference engine responding to user selection of one of a plurality of user-defined modes specifying settings of the parameters to apply the parameter settings specified in the user-selected mode.

25 15. The system of claim 14 wherein the parameters comprise a visibility parameter controlling whether the user is to be included for purposes of generating notifications to other people using the system, a proximity scope parameter controlling a scope within which the people are considered to be in the user's proximity, and people

selection parameter designating a subset of the at least one group of people to include in the notification to the user.

16. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine infers which people are
5 in the user's proximity and generates the notification in accordance with a set of parameters, the value of at least one of the parameters varying by place.

17. The system of claim 8 wherein the inference engine infers which people are
10 in the user's proximity and generates the notification in accordance with a set of parameters, the value of at least one of the parameters varying by time.

18. A computer-readable medium having programming carried thereon of an
information service providing notifications as to proximity of listed persons, the carried
programming comprising:
15 program code operating responsive to user control to manage a listing of persons;
program code operating responsive to place-detecting equipment to track locations of
the user and the listed persons;
program code operating to process the tracked locations and identify those of the
listed persons whose locations correlate with that of the user in accordance with settings of a
20 plurality of parameters; and
program code operating to provide information of the identified persons to the user.

19. The computer-readable medium of claim 18 wherein the carried
programming further comprises:

25 program code operating to apply parameter settings specific to a place in which the
user is located to the identification of those of the listed persons whose locations correlate
with that of the user.

20. The computer-readable medium of claim 18 wherein the carried programming further comprises:

program code operating to apply parameter settings specific to an activity in which the user is engaged to the identification of those of the listed persons whose locations
5 correlate with that of the user.

21. The computer-readable medium of claim 18 wherein the carried programming further comprises:

program code operating to apply parameter settings specified per a time schedule to
10 the identification of those of the listed persons whose locations correlate with that of the user.

22. The computer-readable medium of claim 18 wherein the carried programming further comprises:

program code operating responsive to user selection of a subset of the listed persons
15 to limit the identification of those of the listed persons whose locations correlate with that of the user to the user-selected subset.

23. The computer-readable medium of claim 18 wherein the carried programming further comprises:

program code operating responsive to setting of a visibility parameter for a person as
20 not visible to exclude the person from the identification of those of the listed persons whose locations correlate with that of the user.

24. A method of facilitating group communications, comprising:
25 storing data defining a group of persons and their locations;
continually updating the data with persons' current locations;
continually processing the data to identify at least one subset of the group whose
locations correlate to within a given proximity;

providing notifications to those in the at least one subset, the notifications including
a reference to a group communications medium session for use by an individual in the at
least one subset to establish a connection to the session.

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